

Gloom Over Laos Hit In Nixon 'Fact Sheet'

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In a "fact sheet" circulating at the top of the government, the Nixon Administration is exhorting the official family not to succumb to gloom over the Laos operation.

The fact sheet concedes that the psychological atmosphere here now is similar to that prevailing after the Communist lunar New Year offensive in 1968 when many high-ranking Johnson administration officials were gripped by a sense of despair over the war.

But it cautions: "We must benefit from that lesson and not let ourselves be misled by surface appearances or by exaggerated stories."

Although the Tet offensive was popularly assumed to be a stunning victory for the enemy, former President Lyndon B. Johnson argued publicly at the time that the Communists had suffered staggering losses in men and supplies.

In a parallel vein, the fact sheet on Laos contends: "The operation has achieved its primary objective of carrying the fight to the enemy's sanctuaries and disrupting his principal lines of communications and should buy the South Vietnamese additional time in which to strengthen their armed forces while permitting continuing withdrawal of U.S. combat forces."

President Nixon is expected to take this position publicly in his address to the nation on television Wednesday night. In his first withdrawal announcement since last April, Nixon reportedly will step up the pullout rate from 12,500 to at least 15,000 a month. Enough to remove virtually all U.S. troops from Vietnam by the 1972 presidential election. The current troop ceiling projection for May 1 is 284,000.

The fact sheet contends that "the foundation for Vietnamiza-

tion in South Vietnam is sound (and) has been enhanced by the (Laos) disruptions."

It maintains that the invasion "clearly compounded" the supply problems encountered by Hanoi as a result of the Cambodian incursion and adds: "We believe that the shortfall in their supply efforts will prevent them from mounting major offensives in this dry season and will delay any they might have planned over the next dry season."

It warns, however, that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong might pretend they are "playing from strength" and "in the days immediately ahead mount a sharp flurry of attacks in the northern part of South Vietnam and elsewhere if they can get such attacks off the ground."

The fact sheet suggests that U.S. forces might be the principal target "in an endeavor to increase American casualties, whatever the cost to Hanoi."

"Nonetheless," it insists, "the Communists probably have lost the ability to mount sustained major offensives and the over-all record of Communist activity over the next few months can be expected to support this contention."

The fact sheet concludes that the South Vietnamese fought "very well" in Laos despite the most intense combat since 1968.